

DR ERIC LINDSAY: A, B, C, D ... to Z. A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION

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Abstract: Personal recollections of Eric Lindsay are related by amateur astronomer and member of the Irish Astronomical Association, Terry Moseley.

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It is an honour to be able to pay this short personal tribute to Dr Lindsay. And thanks also to Pat Corvan, a very old friend of mine, and fellow amateur observer, for some additional information which I'll be recounting.

Firstly, don't worry—I won't be going through the whole alphabet! And secondly, the anecdotes won't be in strict alphabetical order—although I will finish with the 'Z'.

I was lucky enough to grow up beside Armagh Observatory, in a big old house called 'The Pavilion', now sadly demolished to provide the site for the Secondary School and College. I lived there until I was 10. As there was only an empty field in between, the Lindsays were my next-door neighbours. So my earliest recollections of them are in that context, not through astronomy.

Dr Lindsay's son, Derek, who is sadly no longer with us, was a year or two older than me, but we still used to occasionally play together. In my first visit to the Observatory grounds, I spied something I had never seen before—large clumps of bamboo! Up until then, I had thought it grew only in China. But when I saw it, one thought only entered my mind—a fishing rod. Not having the money to buy a proper rod, I was determined to make one. So, early one summer morning, before anyone else was up, I sneaked into the grounds and cut the longest sturdiest piece of bamboo I could find. So my first clear recollection of the Lindsays is one of stealing from the Observatory garden! Mark, you can invoice me later. I'm sure that if I had asked Dr Lindsay he would have been happy to give it to me, but I was too scared and too shy to ask. That was the 'B'.

One evening Derek called for me and asked would I like to go and look at a new comet that had just been discovered. I had no real idea what a comet was, but I had seen the mysterious domes at the Observatory, and knew that there were telescopes inside, so of course I said 'yes'. Obviously 'C' is for Comet. But it could also be for 'calamity', as I was totally underwhelmed!

I can't remember the comet, or even what year it was, but all I saw was a dim fuzzy little smudge in the eyepiece. Maybe that's why I had no further interest in astronomy until I was about 18. And in case you are wondering, it wasn't the lovely and spectacular Comet Arend-Roland which appeared in 1957—I had moved away to a different address by the time it appeared. And you'll all be aware that one of the best photographs of a comet's 'anti-tail' was taken by Eric Lindsay with the 12/18-inch Schmidt here at the Observatory.

Eric Lindsay didn't let things get in his way, not even telegraph poles. During the apparition of Comet Arend-Roland there was a particular pole which was blocking the best view of the Comet from the dome. Yes, you're ahead of me ... he subsequently blamed the felling of the pole on vandals, and who am I to disagree?

Have any of you read *The Dangerous Book for Boys*? It's a rebellion against the over-protective nanny-state that we now live in, where youngsters growing up have to be protected against everything, from nettles to knocked knuckles. It wasn't like that in my day! And that brings me to the 'A'. Dr Lindsay bought Derek a birthday present of a proper archery set, with real steel-tipped arrows. The bow was so powerful that we soon started losing arrows in the trees and shrubbery surrounding the Observatory building. So, the only solution, like Wernher von Braun, was to shoot them straight up and see how high we could fire them.

I well remember playing with Derek on the Observatory lawn a game of 'Sagittarius Chicken': the aim was to fire the arrow straight up, stand still, and see how close to where we were standing the arrow would come down! The best shots landed within about 6 feet. Only if we thought it was going to be a direct hit did we chicken out and run for it! And I'm still here, without a hole in my head, to show that I survived. Now, you're not even allowed into the domes in case you bump your head on the telescope!

Which brings me to the next item. As you know, Patrick Moore came to Armagh in August 1965 as the first Director of the Planetarium. Having just got interested in astronomy, I wrote to Patrick, and to cut a long story short, I immediately started doing serious observing with Patrick using his telescopes. Then Dr Lindsay suggested that we could use the Observatory's 10-inch (25cm) Grubb refractor, which was sitting there unused.

It had a proper dome, and a better horizon than any of Patrick's telescopes. So, along with Pat Corvan, another local amateur, we started doing serious observations, mainly of Jupiter and Saturn, but also of the Moon, the other planets, variable stars, novae, etc. Dr Lindsay would occasionally come out and join us for a chat—or to check up on how we were using his telescope! I was always impressed by how he encouraged and valued our amateur visual observations, when he himself was doing work at a truly professional level. We even published several papers in the *Irish Astronomical Journal* based on our observations. And yes, we did bump our heads on the telescope tube, many

many times. And, no, we never even thought about making a claim!

Of course Patrick was not always there, and I remember that there was something that I particularly wanted to observe one night when he was going to be away. So with great trepidation I rang Dr Lindsay and asked if I could use the telescope on my own. He asked me what I knew about the operation of the telescope, opening and closing the dome, winding up the clockwork, setting the drive at the correct speed, etc., and then said I could come up and he would meet me at the dome just for a final check.

When he saw that I 'knew the ropes'—almost literally, as one used a rope on a pulley to turn the dome—he very kindly said that I could use the telescope any time I wanted, on my own. Imagine what that meant to a young amateur, just about three months after starting in astronomy: being given unlimited access to a telescope at one of only two professional observatories in Ireland! Eric was always very keen to encourage amateurs in astronomy, but it would be rare for that sort of thing to happen nowadays.

On one exceptionally clear night in mid-winter I observed Jupiter continuously from dusk to dawn, a total of 12h 20m. After locking up etc., I was leaving the Observatory at about 8.15 a.m., and Dr Lindsay saw me and asked what I was doing there at that time of the morning, so I explained that I'd just had a great all-night session, observing Jupiter for well over a complete rotation of the planet, and had obtained about 130 surface transit observations. He hardly believed me, so I showed him my observations. Then he said, "Terry, I wish that there were more professional astronomers who had as much dedication as you—well done." That was typical of his attitude, and it was tremendous encouragement for a young astronomer.

After Patrick's arrival in Armagh it was decided to revive the moribund Armagh Centre of the Irish Astronomical Society, and soon we had a good series of lectures going, featuring Dr Lindsay, Professor Ópik, Patrick, and other luminaries. After a while, they must have been running out of proper speakers because Patrick asked me to give a lecture on observing Jupiter.

Patrick had great confidence in me, but I wasn't so sure. After all, I was a 19-year old amateur, with only about one year's experience in astronomy. So I approached Dr Lindsay and said "Look, Patrick has asked me to do this, but I'm not sure I can talk to a group including top professionals like yourself." He replied, "Don't worry, Patrick and I both suggested you at the same time—I know you can do it, and you probably know more about the subject than people like me!"

So my first ever public lecture was to an audience including Eric Lindsay, Professor Ópik, Dr David Andrews, Patrick Moore and a few other local astronomers whom I can't recall. I was shaking, but afterwards Dr Lindsay asked me an easy question which I was able to answer, and at the end he came up to me and complimented me; again typical of his warmth and humanity, and encouragement. I never forgot that.

'D' is for Delphinus. In 1967, the English amateur, George Alcock, discovered a very unusual nova in Delphinus. We immediately started observing it, and

it soon began to behave very oddly, showing a long flat peak, then further brightenings, and didn't reach maximum magnitude until some months after its discovery. I remember standing on the Observatory lawn late one evening, checking it with my binoculars, when Eric came to talk to me. I explained that I'd already observed it earlier that evening, but was having another look. He asked if I was going to record the observation, and I said "No, I'd recorded my magnitude estimate a few hours earlier". He then said something else that has always stuck with me: "An observation that isn't recorded isn't worth making at all. *Always* record every one of your observations, as soon afterwards as possible." And I've always tried to follow that advice.

There was some political unrest here in the 1950s, with a period of IRA bombings and shootings. The Observatory was never attacked, perhaps due to some unusual action by Eric Lindsay himself. According to Pat Corvan, at night he used to cover himself with a white sheet, and ride round the grounds on a bicycle to frighten off any intruders! But one night a local policeman was patrolling, saw the ghost on the bicycle, and being obviously well-trained he gave him a sharp rap on the head with his truncheon as he went past. Nowadays, of course, the matter would immediately be referred to the Police Ombudsman, but I think that in those simpler days neither constable nor Director said any more about it!

Dr Lindsay was also a man of great honesty and integrity. The philanthropist, Chester Beatty, gave a grant of £10,000—which was a lot of money in those days—towards a new mounting for the ADH Telescope in Bloemfontein. But Patrick Wayman, then Director at Dunsink, didn't act promptly enough, and the money could not be spent for that purpose. Rather than try to use it for something else, Dr Lindsay very honestly returned the whole £10,000.

One day in 1968 I'll never forget: I was sick in bed with flu when my mother came in and said "Dr Lindsay is here to see you—can I bring him in?" "Oh, 'expletive deleted'," I thought, "what have I done?" I must have damaged the telescope somehow! Or I've left the dome open, and it has rained and everything is ruined. Or I've left the door unlocked, and someone got in and stole the telescope! You've no idea what terrors were going through my mind!

Anyway, Eric came in and said, "Do you know that Patrick Moore is leaving at the end of May, and that the new Director of the Planetarium will be Dr Tom Rackham from Jodrell Bank?" "Yes", I said. "Well, Tom can't take up the post until October, and I'd like you to be the Interim Director until then." If I hadn't already been in bed, I'd have collapsed! I had been helping Patrick out with star shows in the Planetarium when he was overwhelmed, or away on business, so I had some presenting experience, but to be asked to step into Patrick's shoes as Director was an incredible honour and responsibility. I was just about to say "Yes, of course!", when he said "And we'll pay you £1,000". I would have done it for free! How about that for a summer job for a student? But that again was typical of Eric: no snobbery—I was just a humble amateur with only an O-level in physics, but he thought that I could do the job, and that was all that mattered to him.

Finally to the 'Z'. One clear evening when there was no Moon nor any planets visible I said to Patrick "What else can I observe?" "How about variable stars?", he replied. "OK", said I. So he pulled out a selection of BAA variable star charts and said "Have a look at these."

I had always been fascinated by eruptive variables, so when I spotted one called TZ Persei, which was a Z-Cam type, I said I'd like to have a go at that one. Patrick laughed. He said, "You know that that's right in the Milky Way, and it's normally below 14th magnitude? That's not a good one to start with—you'll never find it!" So of course that was a challenge I couldn't resist, and I'm glad to say that I did indeed find it after about 10 minutes: it was on the edge of the double cluster in Perseus, and was about magnitude 14.3, at 'standstill'.

That was before light pollution struck Armagh, and I doubt if you could see it now, even at maximum. It remains my favourite variable star, and it sort of encapsulates all my favourite memories at Armagh: the generosity of Eric Lindsay for letting us use the telescope unsupervised; the lovely clear dark nights; the

camaraderie between Patrick, Pat Corvan and myself; the good relations between the amateurs and the professionals; and the wise and fatherly presence of Eric Lindsay over all.

Terry Moseley is a member of Northern Ireland's amateur astronomical community, with a record extending to the mid-1960s. An assiduous observer, he has served as President of the Irish Astronomical Association (IAA) three times, and also as Observing Section Director and Public Relations Officer. He received the Aidan P. Fitzgerald medal of the IAA in 1992. Under his leadership the Association's journal *Stardust* has become one of the leading amateur astronomy journals in the UK, and the IAA one of the leading groups in the UK and Ireland. At the Whirlpool Star Party in Birr, County Offaly, on the night of 15/16 September 2001 he became the first amateur astronomer to observe through the recently-restored six-foot reflector, the 'Leviathan of Parsonstown'. In 2003, he was honoured by the IAU when minor planet (16693) was named 'Moseley'.